



## **Our Lady of Sorrows & St Bridget of Sweden Catholic Church – A Guided Tour**

**Memorial Square  
112 Twickenham Road  
ISLEWORTH  
Middlesex  
TW7 6DL**

In the Borough of Hounslow - Outer West London  
Diocese of Westminster

# A Guided Tour

*I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of thy house  
And the place where thy glory dwelleth*  
[Psalm 26 v 8]

Catholic churches are not simply places where the faithful gather. They are full of meaning and symbolism whether it is in the structure, the layout, the fittings, the furnishings or the décor. The very shape of the church reflects a system of belief and worship. A church is a material witness to an invisible spiritual reality.

This leaflet is intended to unlock for you some of the meaning of this place of worship.

## General

This church is dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows & St Bridget of Sweden. It is the spiritual home of the Isleworth Catholic community which is over 300 years old, making it one of the oldest in southern England. After centuries of worshipping in a small back street chapel, the community in 1909 emerged into a prominent position in the town with this imposing new church.

The architect was Edward Doran Webb, the architect of the Birmingham Oratory, and the style chosen, as at Birmingham, was Italian Renaissance. The builder was Messrs Erwood & Morris of Bath.

The style derives from the early church by way of the Italian Renaissance and the Catholic reformation. For their places of worship, the early Christians often adopted the basilican plan which was commonly used for Roman public buildings – that is a rectangular nave with a curved and half domed apse and the roof supported by columns. The Italian Renaissance rediscovered these classical models and the Catholic Church, in an effort to rejuvenate itself after the shock of the Protestant Reformation, went back to these early forms in the hope that the architecture would help to put it in touch with its primitive purity. It also had the effect of asserting the importance of Rome in the world-wide Catholic Church.

## The Exterior



The façade is of Bath stone. On it is carved a relief of the Crucifixion of Jesus with his mother Mary and his friend and disciple John standing at the foot of the Cross. In the archway over the door is a relief of the Annunciation.

The sides are of red brick but the bricks are porous and have been rendered with pebbledash to protect them from erosion.

The tower is a later addition in harder brick and contains a bell dedicated to St Michael, which is a memorial to the poets Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper who worshipped here and wrote together under the pen-name 'Michael Field'.

## The Interior



Inside the front door is a **vestibule [1]** with arches and railings separating it from the nave of the church. In ancient times people who had not been baptized would attend services by standing in the porch; the gates and railings emphasizing the importance of baptism as initiation into the community. The organ and choir gallery is above. The floor of the porch is terrazzo marble work. The floors of the aisles and the altar are in the same material but sadly they were damaged during installation of the heating system and are now covered by carpet.

Beyond the golden gates, a **central aisle [2]** leads directly to the apse and the **High Altar [3]**, which dominates the interior. The area under the apse is known as the Sanctuary. It is defined by being at a higher level than the nave and bordered by marble altar rails.

The High Altar is the focus of the central act of Catholic worship – the Eucharist or Mass. It is both the table of a communal meal and an altar of sacrifice – the meal of the Last Supper, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross - which in Catholic thinking are two aspects of the same redemptive event. The altar is of marble and it is located under a canopy called a baldachino. The baldachino, which is supported on marble columns, is intended to emphasize that this is a holy place where heaven and earth meet.



Behind the altar is the tabernacle where the consecrated host is reserved between Masses. Catholics genuflect before the tabernacle because God is present there in the form of the consecrated bread. Reservation of the host serves two purposes: one practical, the other devotional. The practical purpose is that it makes the sacrament readily available to be taken to the sick and housebound; the devotional is that it provides a focus for prayer and contemplation of God's presence in our midst.

The nave of the church is covered by a barrel-vaulted ceiling supported on white stone Corinthian columns. The seats are of oak.

The weight of the roof is carried on the columns and on the partitions of the four bays on each side. On the inner ends of the partitions are the fourteen Stations of the Cross. This is a form of prayer and meditation on the passion of Jesus Christ which originated in Jerusalem where pilgrims would [and still do] follow the route taken by Jesus from Pontius Pilate's court to his Crucifixion and burial.

To the left of the porch under the tower is the former **baptistery [4]**. While liturgically correct, the baptistery was inconvenient and so the font has been moved into the body of the church. The socket in the floor where it stood is now covered by an image of our patron saint, St Bridget of Sweden. The former baptistery now houses the repository shop and parish lending library.

*In the bays beginning on the left hand (north) side are:*

**Confessionals [5]** Private rooms where the Sacrament of Reconciliation is conducted. They replaced the old box confessionals. In the first bay is also a memorial to the men of the parish who died in the Great War.

**English Martyrs [6]** Thomas More, former Chancellor of England, John Fisher, Bishop of Rochester, Richard Reynolds, monk of Syon Abbey and John Haile, Vicar of Isleworth were early victims of Henry VIII's drive to secure acceptance of his religious policies. Other martyrs commemorated here were involved in keeping Catholicism alive in England during the reigns of Elizabeth I and the Stuart kings. We should never forget that while Catholics in England have been persecuted for their faith, Catholics have also been complicit in persecuting others for their beliefs.

**The Baptismal Font and statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus [7]** The font was moved from the baptistery. The statue may have been brought from the old chapel. The purpose of the image is to illustrate graphically the love of God for His creation. This devotion was popularised at a time when, to many people, God and Jesus Christ seemed remote.

*The double doors lead to the **sacristy or vestry [8]***

*Crossing over to the south side:*

**Holy Family [9]** Catholics place great emphasis on the family as a school of love and faith. The Holy Family – Mary the Mother of Jesus, Joseph his adoptive father and Jesus himself are seen as models of a good family life.

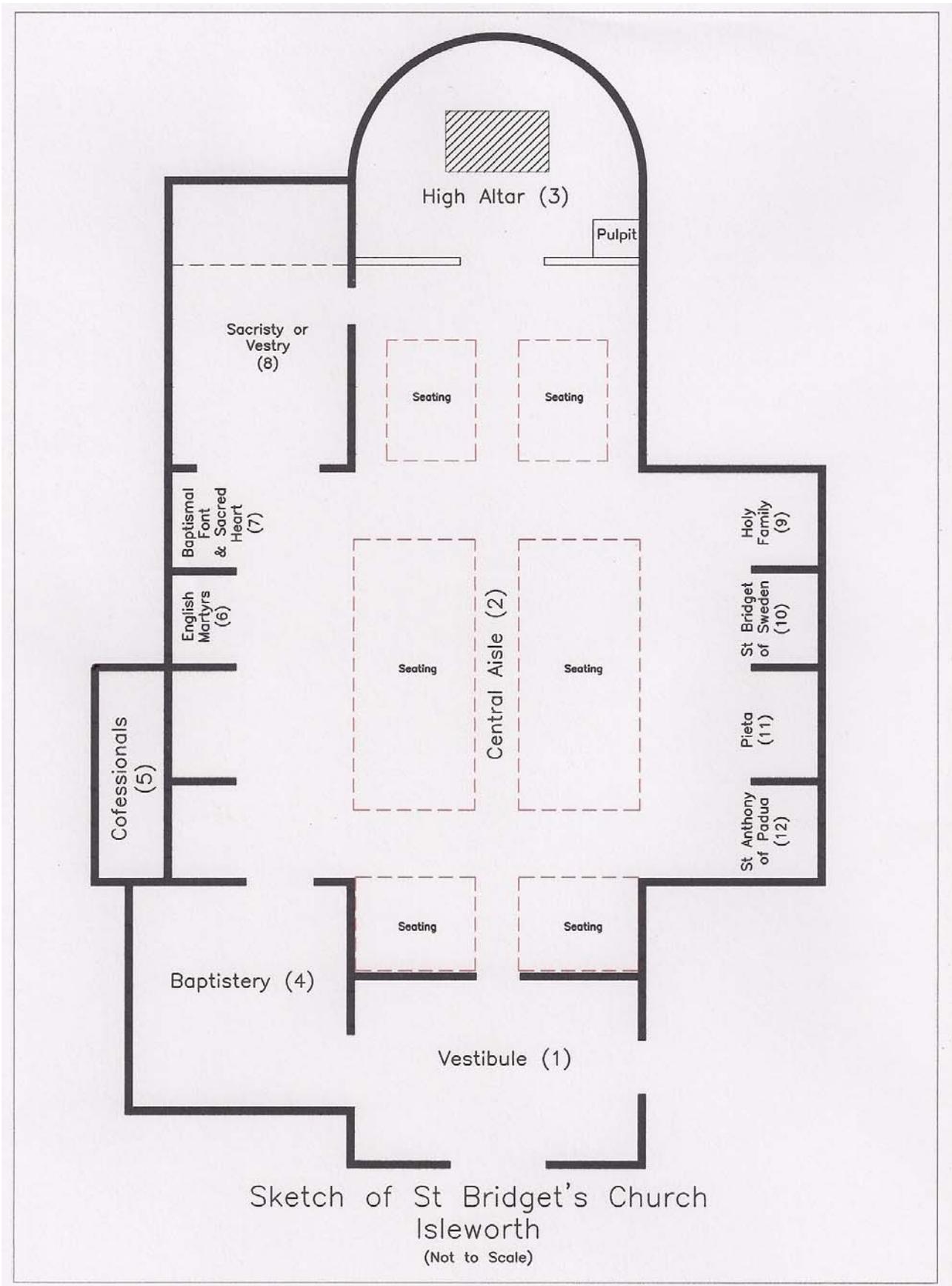
**St Bridget of Sweden [10]** The patron saint of the Isleworth Catholic community. A Swedish noblewoman of the Fourteenth Century, wife and mother, visionary and pilgrim, she was a fearless and often harsh critic of popes and kings, believing passionately that she had a direct mandate from Christ himself. Founder of the Bridgettine Order of nuns and monks whose only house in England was in Isleworth at Syon Abbey [now the site of Syon House]. Her sainthood was recognised shortly after her death and she was recently declared a patron of Europe. She was already patron saint of Sweden. On the wall is a plaque commemorating Monsignor Weld, a former rector.

**Pieta [11]** Donated to the church at its opening. It is the image of a mother [Mary] grieving for her dead Son [Jesus]. Like the Stations of the Cross this image attempts to convey the suffering of Jesus and His Mother. It emphasises their humanity and vulnerability.

**St Anthony of Padua [12]** An early Franciscan friar, a gifted preacher who it was said radiated holiness. He was Portuguese but spent much of his short working life Italy, mainly in Padua where he died and is buried. Usually represented holding the child Jesus. He is believed by many to be a great help in finding lost items.



# Our Lady of Sorrows & St Bridget of Sweden Floor Plan



## Extract from the book

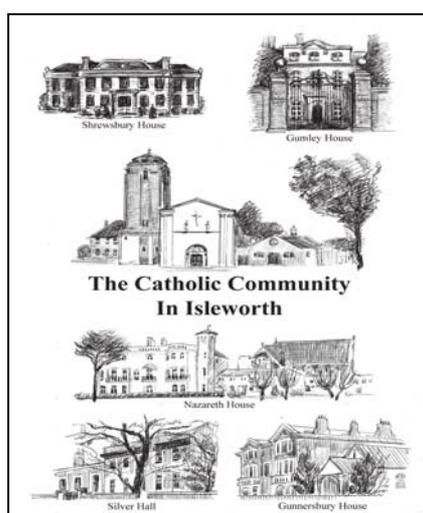
### THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN ISLEWORTH

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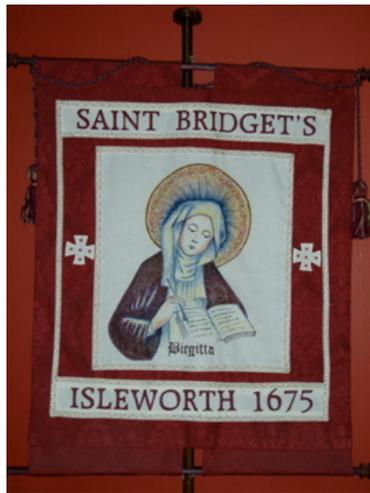
#### TIMELINE

- 1675 Suggested date of origin of the mission. Shrewsbury House or Place first occupied by a member of the Catholic Talbot family who set up a domestic chapel and maintained a chaplain. Lost registers supposed to date from this year.
- 1743 Bishop Challoner visits Shrewsbury Place to confirm 23 people.
- 1746 First entry in surviving register.
- 1758 The Vestry [the local authority] issues a writ alleging that a Catholic chapel has been in use at Shrewsbury Place for 30 years and requiring the chapel closed and the priest to leave on the grounds that it was a threat to the Established Church. The Brentford magistrates throw out the case.
- 1767 The Bishop of London's *Return of Papists* lists 1 priest, 28 male and 31 female Catholics as resident in the Parish of Isleworth. This is the third largest concentration in Middlesex.
- 1770 Shrewsbury Place in use as a boys' school with 60 pupils, all Catholics.
- 1778 First Catholic Relief Act - decriminalises the Catholic priesthood.
- 1779 Second Relief Act - permits churches, chapels and schools.
- 1810 Shrewsbury Place buildings demolished except for the chapel. The priest is Anthony Wareing and the Sunday congregation numbers about 20.
- 1829 Catholic emancipation – restoration of most civil rights to Catholics.
- 1841 Madame d'Houet acquires Gumley House as a convent for her Faithful Companions of Jesus and opens two girls' schools - a private boarding school and a poor school for the children of the town; the forerunners of Gumley and St Mary's Schools respectively.
- 1850 Restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in England and Wales.
- 1851 National census of religious practice finds Anthony Wareing still the priest and 70-80 people worshipping regularly at St Bridget's.
- 1854 New Rector Mgr. Francis Weld opens a poor school for boys adjacent to the chapel.
- 1855 Mgr. Weld provides a new chapel at his own expense.
- 1892 Isleworth House is bought as a convent for the Poor Sisters of Nazareth and renamed Nazareth House.
- 1896 to 1922 The Little Company of Mary nursing sisters occupy Gunnersbury House as novitiate and nursing home.

- 1899 to 1908 A community of Carmelite Nuns occupies Silver Hall
- 1906 Fr. Eric Green becomes Rector.
- 1907 Fr. Green begins the annual Martyrs or Outdoor Procession.
- 1908 New Boys' School opened at Twickenham Road/South Street on land given by the Misses Saunders of Silver Hall.
- 1909 New church built next to the Boys' School. Paid for by Mrs Macdonnell of Nazareth House.
- 1910 New church consecrated. Children's home and chapel built at Nazareth House.
- 1922 Clock Tower War Memorial outside the church opened.
- 1925 War memorial inside the church unveiled by the Viscount Fitzalan.
- 1926 Tower added to new church.
- 1927 Bell installed and dedicated to St Michael in memory of the poets Ruth Bradley and Edith Cooper who wrote under the pen-name 'Michael Field'.
- Late 1920s Guild Hall added.
- 1935 New rectory built.
- 1970 Canonization of Isleworth Martyr, Richard Reynolds.
- 2002 Nazareth House closes.
- 2009 The parish celebrates the centenary of the opening of the present church.



For more about the history of the church and the community that worships here see ***The Catholic Community in Isleworth*** available from the church repository shop, price £5.



### ***Prayer of St Bridget of Sweden***

Hasten, O Lord! Enlighten my darkness, speak to my soul. Nothing happens without you permitting it, and nothing you permit is without comfort. O Jesus Son of God, you who were silent in the presence of your accusers, restrain my tongue until I find what I should say and how to say it. Show me the path and make me follow it. In delay, there is danger, but in haste there is likewise peril. Therefore, Lord, give ear to my petition and show me the way. I come to you, as the sick go to the doctor in search of aid. I long for you like the dying. O Lord, give peace to my heart. Amen.

Bridgettine Sisters, Maryvale Institute, Birmingham



Our Lady of Sorrows and St Bridget of Sweden Catholic Church  
Priest in Charge: Father Stewart Hasker  
112 Twickenham Road, Isleworth, Middlesex TW7 6DL  
Office email: [isleworth@rcdow.org.uk](mailto:isleworth@rcdow.org.uk)  
Tel: 020 8560 1431  
[www.stbridgets.org.uk](http://www.stbridgets.org.uk)

Acknowledgement and thanks for this publication to:

Contents written by  
Stuart Bagnall

CAD floor plan by  
Doreen Rielly

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